

INSCRIPTIONS, FORESHADOWINGS

POEMS

Steven Frattali

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INSCRIPTIONS, FORESHADOWINGS

I

Illuminator, I can never
Feel you
Near me, I search
For my renewal, yet in vain

Although I want to
Know you, perhaps I sense
That you are near me
Now and then

You circulate
And are a part
Of the city
Of men

Yet exist
Elsewhere,
Somewhere
Where?

Sun above buildings, the
Trees move
With the wind

What moves

Inside of men,
Inside of women,
In the time below?

I am an exile
Here in the city of men
What can I be
In the Heavenly
City above?

II

Illuminator, you
Who elude me,
Even best efforts
As though

Chasing a shadow
And yet you are,
So it is
Written, light

Come to me
Where I am
Here in the

Dark, myself

Or shall I
Not ask? instead
Merely stay
Here, silent, and thinking

III

Light through
The window
Haunted with
Shadow bars,

Illuminated
Cloth of drapes,
Palm fronds
Of blinds

I see these
Reminders,
Reminders,
Reminders

IV

Where there is light
There is fire, or
If there might not be,
Then how, where?

In the sun
There is fire,
There is
Infinite fire,

It burns for
The world,
Though the world
Stays as it is

V

In the end
There are
Gaps, and a life
Leaks away

In the end
There is this,
A ring
Is pulled from a hand

And yet it
Is written
There is something
And somewhere

VI

Illuminator, inhabitant
Of thought
Beyond thinking
Where thought cannot,

What cannot be
Seen, deep in
The eye itself,
Blind spot of light,

Illuminator, extending
Hands so purely
Empty, shadows
Of tree branches

Blown through
By the wind

VII

Spirit of holiness
Set down your light
Here to guide me,
Here all around me,

Smallest of places
Here, greatest
Of light, here
And now place and time

VIII

I seek to help
Those who
Can't be as they
Need to

Bringing them
Loaves and fishes
Not from myself
But you

IX

Steps in the darkness
Nonetheless somehow
Guided, not guided
But unthought, unwilled,

Almost, almost right

X

Light on snow
Faint blue with
Shadows of trees,
Dark leaves scattered

With branches
Quite bare,
Loud crows
Alighting

Something perceived
Not apparent
But here,
Growing silently

Through me
As I stand here,
Watching,
Listening

XI

Who has come
Down from
The light, scattering
Radiance unseen,

Invisible,
Insight unknowable,
Dream bread
Inedible?

Time reaches
Out in
A vortex
Down the street

XII

And so
When the angel
Announced
Impossibility --

Radiant, golden,
Eternal, unreal --
The Word moved
In dark strings,

Caught in them
Out of tune,
Silent, discordant,
Ringing in veins of light

XIII

Give to the poor
Their bread
That they need,
The doctors

Must come
To them,
How else to
Be human?

We,
The observers,
How else
To live?

XIV

You the
Observer,
What do you
See?

The man --
Yes he is
That --
Standing and lost?

XV

Writers
With fancy
Speech --
Confections,

Delusions

XVI

Sub-human scum,
Scum
And rabble --
These are so many

Money, it
Is money
That flurries
The mind's breath

As though
The leaves
Should blow
The wind

XVII

I am the
Lord of words
What is
Unspoken

Speaks now
Through me
What is unknowable,
This I yet know

What is
Unshowable,
Unacknowledged,
I show

XVIII

You have no coat,
No hat and no
Gloves, and
It's freezing

Snow and
Ice needles
Blow slanted
In sleet wind

Your eyebrows
White, your face
Red, your hands
Raw and stiffened

You call to me
From your place
Near the bank's
Overhang --

"Please sir,"
Coming forward --
"Please sir,
Some spare change"

In the
Psychiatric
Hospital
There are

Those who
Wait, fearing
Their own
Minds,

Their crumbling
And porous
Selves -- others
Are moving

Through them,
Appearing,
Speaking,
Warning

We rest in
The warm sun
Of the hospital
Compound

A plane
Appears
From the nowhere
Out of bright infinite blue

Low above
The buildings
The shadow
Of its wings

Across the
Grass and up
-- a cross
Of shadow,

Of a machine,
Flows, rippling,
Climbing
The sunlit wall

XXI

Illuminator, you work
Within me now
At every point
Of my being erased

My glass
Of slowing
Effervescence,
My evermore

Approximate
Outline, a fading
Silhouette
On your bright white ground

XXII

Earliest morning,
And I think
Of the day
Before it has come

Yet even

In the darkness
Well before sunrise,
From set stones

Of black marble --
Horizon clouds
Shot through with
Injections

Of cornflower light,
The day is already,
The time is slipping by,
Tasks mounting within

XXIII

Our tasks are so many --
The others who
Need what we have,
If we have it,

If we have it to give
This is our doubt,
The narrow ledge
That we walk

On one side
Is a wall of
Concrete and steel,
Of money and law,

On the other,

Catastrophe of
Historical failure, corruption --
Aborted, useless, and erased

XXIV

My existence
Unwritten by
The others
Who crowd me,

They who despise
The type of self
That I am,
Although they don't know it --

Yet changes
In motions, new cloud
Patterns forming
In the sky - look up!

Cautious, and wary,
I walk beneath
The radiant blue bowl --
Watching, guessing,

With new aspirations

Leaves littered
On the ground,
Wet and rain-limp
Yet still

With their veins,
Treacherous, slippery
At times, even
Dangerous -

So many there are
I think as I walk along,
So many fallen leaves
And the hazards they create

A stone
Long
Ago was placed
In my hand

Who did it and when?
Impossible questions
A candle lit in my mind
And then

A fountain
Opened in my hand

Lying down
To sleep
At midnight,
Sheave by sheave

Littered
Beside me
On the earth-
Field

Like leaves
Littered aside,
Yet still more than leaves,
Sheaves fallen

To enwrap me
In equivocal shelter,
An exhibited exposure
All corn husks

And bright hair

XXVIII

And a gaping
Nakedness
Exposed, this
Is my core --

Cells, elements,
Mosaics perhaps
Seeds of the future,
Remnants of past

Transience -- was
It growing at all
Or withering? --
There is none who can say

Light of the
Bright moon, of autumn -- full
And beacon-like --
Burning me with questions

Unknown and
Dimly known,
The opening
Of Light

In the landscape
Of the mind,
The stealing
Of soft radiance

So slowly through
The self of
Memories -- some
Faint and others

The occult and
Agonized and dark
Yet just as any field
Takes on opal frosts

At morning
Or sun sparkling dew
In the first
Burnt chill of the winter,

So then this other too

In the end of
Illusion there
Is calmness
And not peace

Calmness disturbed
By the agitations
Of the day,
The weather

Of circumstance,
The vileness
Of humans and
The darkness of their hearts

XXXI

Distorted teacher,
You who cast abroad
The bad seed of
Your illness,

It is not seeds
That you spread,
It is powers
And powers of powers,

Multiplied, multiplied,
Beyond any walls
Or curriculum, far
Beyond yourself --

An evil far beyond your mere self
And your mindless protocols

XXXII

Illuminator, I have
The flaw written
Down the length
Of my character

Like lightning
Splitting a tree
Down through -- I
Am the focal point

Which everything
Must lean toward,
I am the only
Living creature on earth

XXXIII

I am not inclined
To kneel down and
Pray, I do not feel
Like going to confession

These things,
Although it might sound
Arrogant, strike me
As for fools,

Or otherwise
For children,
But I am neither
Deep in ancestral dreams,

Far in the pillaged heart,
Well into the vortex
That the urban street
Becomes, in the vivid

Trauma and terror
Of the mugging or the rape,
In the consultation with
The homeless, the addicted,

The dysfunctional, the
Insulted and the injured,
I, like some others --
This is where I'm found

Instructors, how many?
Can the earth
Know its own?
Can mystical

Viaticum be changed
To a word, a word
Of many words, and
Relationships come

Forward where miracle
Had been? Yet Christ
Did as much, his speech
Gathering thousands,

His poor robes
Promising little,
His two hands
Holding nothing

Instructor, crucified,
Your arms are
Open wide, as though
To embrace the world

And yet
You cannot move,
The world
Is untouched

XXXVI

The teacher, scourged
At a whipping post,
Gouts of blood
And strips of flesh

Torn off, and we,
Below, bleed also,
Tear our own flesh,
Or have it torn by others

XXXVII

Radiant passion
To fill the whole void
Of earth, this is
The advent gift,

This is the holy trace,
This is the Lord
Who lies hidden within
The numinous gesture,

The eye quick with mercy
Or the eyes closed in thought

XXXVIII

The gift of existence
Overwhelms the existent,
Fills, and fills further,
Every point of its life,

Every organ of self
And soul a virtual
Sun, streaming outward
And outward, profusion,

No limit, endless
And infinite, beyond
Any calculus, even though mortal,
Yet still with no measure

And still with no end

XXXIX

Medicine for the mind,
Advice for the body too --
Power streams into
The soul by these and yet

Other routes, for these
Are the measured ways,
Gradient, weighted,
Yet our life has few markers,

And its substance is light

XL

You who are reading
Me now must do so
With forethought,
With afterthought,

With meditative care
You do not know
What I'm saying,
How can you?

You are you, and not I

XLI

The Lord, we are told,
Protects drunks and fools
I drink from the air
And from the streaming light

I drink the cloud patterns
As they change each instant
I hold up to the wind
Both my hands, though little
arrives

XLII

I await the redemption
From the kingdom of money,
I await the renewal
Of Being and of Time

How can it ever come?
The torrential blood flow,
The lies thickly tangled,
The last occlusion of mind

XLIII

Instructor, the
Lies then with
Which they
Encircled you,

The one signal
Lie, but then
Numerous others,
Crowds instinct

With falsehood,
As though
Breathing it
Out, the

Stench
Of the human,
Each person
A crowd --

Swaying, clinging
To the next,
Scarcely able
To stand

In vertiginous
Delusion, mendacity
Seething, staggering
Weight of the unreal

The end of
The culture
Of greed
And of delusion,

The end of the
Regime
Of torture
And of money,

The advent
Of justice,
The coming
Of mercy,

The appearance
Of the teacher,
The true one,
The guide

Seething darkness
Of non-space
And no time
Where thought has its end

Glimmering well
Of night echoes
Filled with stars,
Absence of light

Itself light,
No time and
No speech to
Grasp or to clarify

Active innumerable
Unstable points
Filling
The uncontained

Burning, elusive,
The near empty
Book of dreams,
That these your life

Now all just
Barely, barely remembered
Here it was, and
There, and then

And all the times
In small fragments, brief
Vaguest of images,
Voices sometimes also

XLVII

You who have
Guided me
From there to here,
You who shall

Guide me
From here to tomorrow,
Through the sand routes
No footprints

Can last in, the
Stone waste,
The desert of
The death sun

And the scorpion

XLVIII

What is my name?
Is it written
Here on the chart,
The plastic band

On my wrist?
Or is it
Written in sand,
Through the infinite sojourn?

XLIX

Hail fellowship
Of holy earth!
Holy and holiest Light,
Your infinite

Onstreaming,
Unceasing illumination,
The endless
Procession of skies

That you raise
And fill out with
The absolute splendor of

Clearing expanding space --

Openness opened now
Of emptiness reborn, redeemed,
The inexhaustible newness,
Endless novelty of sight

L

Light wave or
Light particle,
The sovereignty
Of light --

As in
Lightning --
Surpasses
All substance

LI

Logos, your
Being transcends
Every being,
The self that you are

Is filled bright
With an emptiness
Made splendid
By sheerest ubiquity

Sun above these rooftops
And the day is
Streaming atoms
Of light, blinding

And white blue seas,
My eyes are put out,
And yet I walk along,
Cinder of a man

Stricken, upright,
Nevertheless feeling
This elemental mind
The radiant bright waves

You are the empty day
Filled with infinite dreams,
I move through it
In hope and fear
That they come true

On these two open hands
Pour down strange substance --
Light,
Overwhelming and subtle influence
Bringing both hope and fear

LIV

Radiant king, my sovereign,
Light itself, you are
The open secret, shelter me
In the chaotic dark

I must come back
From shedding every skin,
Abandoning my shell
Of nearly lived-in life

LV

Passing breezes gratifying
To breathe, not to the eye
--look for what can't be seen,
Even not be found

Moving, stirring although
Within this -- dim margin
Set upon the living soul
That it come close,

But yet not touch

Moths out at night,
A fragile thing
Made of paper,
Feathers, silk

The open night
Receives it,
Unlimited and
Always famished

LVII

Night lightning
And the flash
Breaks open
What was sealed

If only
It would last
So that I might
See into,

And see through

LVIII

I breathe and so
I hope, and light
Suffuses me, I fill
With aspiration

I feel power,
A perilous
Insight comes,
Uncertainty as well

What can be done,
What ventured,
And what said?
Nothing, the voices

Crying
In the wind
Call out, crying
They call out nothing

LIX

Illuminator, I
Have sought
For you, have I sought
For you in vain?

Where do you exist?
The sky rings
With your power, a
Light suffuses everything

The world burns
In brightness,
And every object shines
As though with an inner light

Instructor, crucified,
You come forth
From your cross,
An emanation

From its darkness
As though light
Should come from shadow,
As though life

Should come from death
Redeemer, crucified
Yet reigning
From the gallows tree,

Your hands are nailed
And yet you hold them out
For all to come, for all
To be embraced, to see

Envoy

There is a darkness
Remaining inside
The candle's light
Often not seen

And yet it is there

There is an absence
Inside the
Shimmering flame
It is not what it is

There is a doubt
In the mind
Of even believers at prayer
A shadow falls over me

I am not what I am

AFTERWORD

Encounters With the Author in Taipei

We first made the author's acquaintance at a well-known restaurant in Taipei, the Wysteria Tea House, famous as having been a meeting place for dissident intellectuals in the years of political struggle in Taiwan .

During the recent effort to publish his rather extensive work, we had occasion to discuss aspects of his past and current writing.

Your poetry is quite varied in style and in form. Where do you locate yourself in the overall debate concerning poetic form?

I consider myself an eclectic. The main thing for me is to grasp, mentally, a certain object -- that is, an experience, a scene, an event -- to see it and feel it. Any language that seems to convey the reality of that is good, any which remains merely language,

merely words, is for me of no interest, in some cases it is actively negative, in the sense of being obstructive.

A cliche?

Yes or not even a cliche but in a way worse than that. Much of our language obscures the nature of reality. Words in themselves are, in a sense, the enemy of writing. I tell students that all the time. Words most often merely convey the usual accepted social understanding. Writing is for the purpose of grasping reality itself, which is always something other than the social understanding.

Do you consider yourself a political writer?

All writing is political in the sense of attempting to correct these false social understandings. At times its purpose is to merely reveal with a new freshness, a perceptual freshness, as it were. But even this itself has a certain basic political significance, in the sense that awakened human beings will act and think differently than those who are at rest in the normal tranquilized

non-perception that we usually are caught up in.

Does living outside the United States help or hinder your writing?

I think it helps, in general. It is in some ways a very undeveloped culture, yet in other ways it is overbearing. (The US, that is.) There is, for example, a great deal of rather stifling political correctness, as it's called, and to get away from that is itself a positive thing. For a while I had no idea how I would ever get all this material published, especially if you're not there trying to do all the "networking" that is needed, and which I was absolutely terrible at anyway -- worse than terrible, I really had no clue, I still don't, I suppose. And then it came about that you could just do it all by yourself, by means of the internet.

How much material is it? It's quite a lot, it would seem.

Yes, I guess it's about 40 volumes or so. Over 2,000 pages, if you want to measure it like that. I don't know how much it would weigh.

There seem to be many styles represented. Was that something you consciously strove for?

Yes. I always wanted to be able to represent a wide variety of experiences. My first models for the artist were people such as Picasso, Goethe, Bach -- artists who could work in a very wide range of forms and even use widely different styles. Of course, I can't compare myself to people like that, but it was still a goal, to try many types of things.

What sorts of things are you working on currently?

Well as you know I am trying to get all this existing work published, going through it, touching it up here and there, proofreading, and so forth. After that, I think I might return to some translating work -- Holderlin especially, and some Chinese poets, but don't ask me which ones.

All right, but can you say whether they are modern or classical?

Classical. My favorite is Mung Hao-Ren, actually.

*What were you trying to do in
these poems in particular?*

It was an attempt to use a somewhat plain almost anonymous style to express devotional themes, not necessarily in the voice of the author, but in a sort of collective voice, expressing things that many people feel.

About the Author

Steven Frattali is an expatriate American writer living in Taipei. He is the author to date of over 40 volumes of poetry, totaling over 2,000 pages of work. He is also the author of several critical works, among them *Person, Place and World: A Late Modern Reading of Robert Frost* and *Hypodermic Light: The Poetry of Philip Lamantia and the Question of Surrealism*.

About the Banyan Press of Taipei

The Banyan Press of Taipei was founded in 2008 by Samuel Palmer and Steven Frattali. It plans to publish the work of expatriate Anglophone writers of the Pacific Rim who are working outside the norms of mainstream publishing. The Press does not at this time invite submissions, but it hopes to do so in the future.

